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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in the critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: women's human rights and the elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls as defined in the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly

Statement submitted by the Legião da Boa Vontade (Legion of Good Will), a non-governmental organization in general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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The Legion of Good Will (Legião da Boa Vontade), a non-governmental organization (NGO) in general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, in its permanent campaign against hunger and for the dignity of women and their eternal spirits, promotes women's and girls' human rights in several worldwide programmes developed by professionals and volunteers in its 552 community centres in Brazil and around the world.

Women's and girls' education and training, health, power and decision-making are essential tools to combat poverty and to ensure women's development and the elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls.

As the President of the organization, José de Paiva Netto, declared: "Solidarity has outgrown the bright field of ethics and is visible now as a strategy, in order to enable human beings to reach survival. We propose to counteract certain effects of globalization (which bring about increased poverty), by the all-encompassing

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universalization of fraternal love as a powerful tool against the pseudo-fatalism of poverty. Thousands of years ago, Virgil warned in the Aeneid: Hunger is a bad adviser. Based on that warning, decades ago I launched to the awareness of nations the proposition of a new kind of economic doctrine: the economics of human solidarity, within the strategy of survival ... Charity should be the inspiring light of peoples' Governments. Charity is the most powerful equipment for peace, when it is also understood as fraternity and solidarity."

The Legion of Good Will's international, educational and social programmes have improved the lives of multitudes of women, girls and children in need, through its 552 community centres around the world, comprised of day care centres, homes for elderly people, as well as the traditional Midnight Charity Round, Mobile Soup Kitchen, which since 1962 has been saving the lives of those who are homeless and live in the streets. Among the several campaigns of the Legion of Good Will to enhance women's and girls' dignity for a better life and empowerment, we give emphasis to the mother child health-care programme. This programme aims to cooperate to decrease malnutrition, maternal and child mortality rates. It helps destitute mothers to bear their children safely. The unborn child receives food and medical support before and after birth until one year of age. Beyond the physical care for mother and child, educational, psychological, nutritional, sanitation and health-care workshops re-educate and improve women's social and family conditions. According to statistical information published by UNICEF, because of poverty Brazil faces an alarming situation regarding child mortality: 120,000 children die annually before reaching their first year of life, and 57,000 do not survive even their first week of life. To minimize this catastrophic situation, the Legion of Good Will increased resources to fight against child mortality. During 2002, a total of 22,344 mothers and children benefited through the mother child health-care programme.

The Legion of Good Will provides more than 100 places in free pre-schools and schools for underprivileged children with a multicultural curriculum. Emphasis is on cooperative learning strategies, multimedia teaching and learning, cooperative discipline, encouraging student responsibility and self-discipline, gender equity to avoid gender inequities; many girls do not receive an equal education. The main purpose of the Legion's instructional strategies is to guarantee a healthy childhood with solid educational basis for children, fostering children's individual, intellectual, collective and human development.

The Legion maintains the Educational, Cultural and Community Centre José de Paiva Netto in Rio de Janeiro. This centre can care for more than 1,000 children. The Legion provides nursery care, day care centres, pre-schools and elementary schools (first to fourth grades). More than 2,000 families are provided with professional training, medical and dental care, daily food basket distribution, clothes, shoes, as well as educational workshops with emphasis on women's health and human rights, and orientation to encourage men and women to prevent sexually transmitted diseases, HIV/AIDS and sexual and reproductive health issues. It promotes the Campaign "Don't do drugs — To live is better", preventing men and women from using drugs, re-educating them to succeed in a drug-free environment. It develops non-discriminatory education and training to enable women to be computer literate, reducing the female illiteracy rate in science and technology.

We would like to conclude this statement reaffirming that the Legion of Good Will's campaigns for women's and girls' human rights are based on actions for gender equality and the advancement of women. The Legion of Good Will's media are open to promote the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which reflects a new international commitment to the goals of equality, development and peace for all women everywhere.